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ABSTRACT

Results are presented of a survey questionnaire based on the 1984 Gallup Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Public Schools but adapted to solicit the opinions of K-12 public school teachers in South Dakota about South Dakota public schools. Responses were received from 60 percent of the 500 teachers surveyed. Question topics included: (1) overall quality of the schools; (2) recruitment and retention of teachers; (3) reasons for leaving the classroom; (4) public school problems in the community; (5) school problems; (6) reasons for discipline problems; (7) academic standards; (8) teacher unions and associations; (9) required subjects for college-bound students; (10) required subjects for non-college-bound students; (11) external influences on the public schools; and (12) goals of education. Responses are presented in tabular format with narrative commentary. Findings of the study are summarized. (JD)

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ATTITUDES OF SOUTH DAKOTA TEACHERS TOWARD THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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For the past seventeen years a Gallup Poll has been conducted annually to determine the American public's attitude toward the public schools. The findings of this survey are published each fall in the PHI DELTA KAPPAN, the journal published by the educational organization, Phi Delta Kappa.

A new Gallup Poll was conducted in 1984. Published in the October 1, 1984 issue of the KAPPAN was "The Gallup Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Public Schools." The primary purposes of this survey were to determine teacher attitudes and to establish basepoint measurement from which to track opinion trends in subsequent surveys. Secondly, this study compared teacher attitudes on key topics with views held by the general public.

Those involved in the Gallup Polls have encouraged local school people to use the surveys in any way that would help assess attitudes and ideas in their own school area. Modification of survey questions also was condoned and even encouraged by the original researchers.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The 1984 Gallup Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Public

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Schools was changed somewhat in order to survey K-12 public school teachers in South Dakota. Some questions were changed slightly to make the poll more germane to education in South Dakota.

The population for this study was the total number of public school teachers in the state of South Dakota. From a list of approximately 7000 public school teachers provided by the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education in Pierre, SD, a sample of 500 public school teachers teaching in grades K-12 was selected using the systematic sampling technique.

During January, 1985 the selected teachers were mailed the questionnaire. If the questionnaires were not returned within a four week period a follow-up postcard was mailed requesting completion and return of the questionnaire. Sixty percent of 500 selected teachers surveyed responded.

After the information was received by the investigators, percentages were calculated for each response option on the poll.

Participants were asked to provide some general information about themselves. From this data we can generalize that the average teacher respondent was female, holds a Bachelor's degree, and was between 25 and 39 years of age. There was broad representation from all South Dakota school districts, large and small. The distribution of teachers across grade levels was fairly equal.

FINDINGS OF STUDY

Grades for South Dakota Education

When asked about overall quality of schools 61% of the

teachers surveyed gave South Dakota schools a "B" grade. Fifty-seven percent gave their own local school a "B" and 63% gave the teachers in their local school a "B". The administrators did not fare quite so well. Only 44% of the teachers questioned gave their administrators a "B". School Boards also got a lower evaluation with 25% giving a "B" and 43% giving their local school board a "C."

Teacher education is undergoing much criticism today but the majority of teachers in the sample gave a "B" grade or better to their own teacher education preparation. Eleven percent gave an "A" while 44% gave a "B."

Recruitment and Retention of Teachers

When asked if the school in which they taught had difficulty in getting good teachers 74% said "no." Fifty-nine percent stated that the school in which they taught did not have difficulty in keeping good teachers.

Many public school teachers are leaving the classroom. Table 1 presents reasons that have been given for leaving teaching. Low teacher's salaries were given as the primary reason for teachers leaving the profession.

TABLE 1

REASONS FOR LEAVING THE CLASSROOM

Responses in Percentage

69% Low teacher salaries
38% Low standing of teaching as a profession
37% Discipline problems in schools
27% Lack of public financial support for education
26% Parents don't support the teachers
22% Outstanding teacher performance goes unrewarded

22% Students are unmotivated, uninterested in school
20% Difficulty of advancement
8% Parents are not interested in children's progress

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.)

Salaries and Merit Pay

Ninety-two percent of the teachers believe that their salaries are too low. However, 82% opposed giving higher salaries to those teachers in short supply (math, science, etc.). Merit pay was strongly opposed by 73% because 77% believe it is simply too difficult for teachers to be evaluated fairly. However, 67% of those surveyed do believe that there are teachers in their school who are sufficiently outstanding to warrant merit pay.

Public School Problems in the Community

Table 2 indicates the biggest problems with which the public schools must deal in their local communities. The three greatest concerns are parents lack of interest and support, lack of proper financial support and low teacher salaries.

TABLE 2

PUBLIC SCHOOL PROBLEMS IN THE COMMUNITY

Responses in Percentage

45% Low teacher salaries
45% Parents' lack of interest/support
41% Lack of proper financial support
41% Lack of respect for teachers/other students
34% Pupils' lack of interest/truancy
34% One-parent households
28% Problems with administration
27% Lack of discipline
27% Lack of public support
24% Communication problems
20% Drinking/alcoholism
19% Use of Drugs

19% School board policies
18% Lack of proper facilities
15% Parental involvement with school activities
14% Government interference/regulation
13% Moral standards
13% Difficulty getting good teachers
12% Teachers' lack of interest
10% Large schools/overcrowding
 8% Mismanagement of funds/programs
 7% Integration/busing
 7% Lack of needed teachers
 6% Crime/vandalism

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.)

Table 3 presents a series of problems that occur in many schools in the United States. Percentages indicate frequency of occurrence in schools in South Dakota.

TABLE 3

SCHOOL PROBLEMS

Response in Percentage

Physical attacks on teachers or staff
 0%Most of the time 3%Fairly often 90%Not at all 7%Don't know

Truancy, being absent from school
 5%Most of the time 57%Fairly often 23%Not at all 15%Don't know

Theft of school property
 1%Most of the time 30%Fairly often 42%Not at all 27%Don't know

Racial fights between whites, blacks, Hispanics, or other minorities
 1%Most of the time 6%Fairly often 85%Not al all 8%Don't know

Schoolwork and homework assignments not completed
 4%Most of the time 68%Fairly often 15%Not at all 13%Don't know

Taking money or property by force, using weapons or threats
 0%Most of the time 8%Fairly often 83%Not at all 9%Don't know

Stealing money or personal property belonging to other students, teachers, or staff
 0%Most of the time 34%Fairly often 41%Not at all 25%Don't know

Drinking alcoholic beverages at school
0%Most of the time 14%Fairly often 60%Not at all 26%Don't know

Cheating on test
2%Most of the time 48%Fairly often 17%Not at all 33%Don't know

Vandalizing of school property
0%Most of the time 38%Fairly often 35%Not at all 27%Don't know

Sexual activity at school
1%Most of the time 11%Fairly often 56%Not at all 32%Don't know

Behavior that disrupts class
4%Most of the time 54%Fairly often 22%Not at all 20%Don't know

Use of drugs at school
0%Most of the time 4%Fairly often 49%Not at all 47%Don't know

Sloppy or inappropriate dress
2%Most of the time 34%Fairly often 50%Not at all 14%Don't know

Selling of drugs at school
1%Most of the time 7%Fairly often 49%Not at all 43%Don't know

Skipping classes
2%Most of the time 35%Fairly often 38%Not at all 25%Don't know

Carrying of knives, firearms, or other weapons at school
0%Most of the time 5%Fairly often 75%Not at all 20%Don't know

Talking back to, disobeying teachers
3%Most of the time 58%Fairly often 19%Not at all 20%Don't know

Many people say that "discipline" is one of the major problems of the public schools today. Table 4 presents reasons South Dakota teachers indicated were explanations for discipline problems in their local schools. Lacking discipline in the home was cited as the foremost cause for discipline problems in the school.

TABLE 4

REASONS FOR DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS

Responses in Percentage

84% Lack of discipline in the home
60% Lack of respect for law and authority throughout society

51% Students who are constant troublemakers often can't be removed from the school
50% Decline in teaching of good manners
42% Punishment is too lenient
40% The courts have made school administrators so cautious they don't deal severely with student misbehavior
36% Teachers who are not properly trained to deal with discipline problems
34% One-parent families
32% Viewing television programs that emphasize crime and violence
23% Teachers themselves do not command respect
19% Failure on the part of teachers to make classroom work more interesting

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.)

Educational Standards

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents expressed the opinion that children should be promoted from grade to grade only if they can pass examinations. When asked, should all high school students in the United States be required to pass a standard nationwide examination in order to get a high school diploma, 46% said "no" and 42% said "yes." Seventy-seven percent believe students who fail should be required to take special remedial classes in the subjects they fail while 16% believe students should be required to repeat the whole year's work.

Regarding entrance requirements to colleges and universities, 53% believe that requirements "should not" be raised. Thirty-eight percent believe that requirements "should" be raised. Should those who want to become teachers be required to pass a state examination to prove their knowledge in the subjects they plan to teach? In response to this question, 49% said "yes" and 40% said "no." When asked if they would like to see their own child become a teacher it was clearly indicated that if a son or daughter was to become a teacher it was more preferred for

the daughter. Forty-nine percent would like to see a daughter become a teacher and 41% would like to see a son enter the teaching profession.

Teachers and Unions or Associations

Teachers see unions as helpful. Fifty-one percent feel unionization has helped the quality of public education in the United States. Forty-eight percent indicated that public school teachers should be permitted to strike. Eighty-nine percent believed arbitration in cases of impasse between union and school board was essential.

Required High School Subjects

Table 5 presents those school subjects which South Dakota teachers would require every high school student to take if s/he plans to go on to college.

TABLE 5

REQUIRED SUBJECTS FOR COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENTS

Responses in Percentage

90%	English
89%	Science
88%	Mathematics
79%	History/U.S. Government
44%	Health Education
43%	Business
41%	Physical Education
32%	Foreign Language
28%	Industrial Arts/Homemaking
27%	Music
25%	Art

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.)

Table 6 presents those school subjects which South Dakota teachers would require every high school student to take if s/he does not plan to on to college

TABLE 6

REQUIRED SUBJECTS FOR NON-COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENTS

Responses in Percentage

87%	English
83%	Mathematics
73%	Industrial Arts/Homemaking
69%	History/U.S. Government
65%	Business
61%	Science
55%	Health Education
40%	Physical Education
23%	Music
20%	Art
5%	Foreign Language

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.)

More School Not Needed

There has been much discussion recently about lengthening the school day and also encouraging a longer school year. South Dakota teachers gave a NO to both suggestions. Fifty-nine percent opposed extending the school day and 63% opposed extending the school year.

Sex Education

When asked if the public high schools should include sex education in their program, 86% stated that it "should" be included in the curriculum. When asked if elementary schools should include sex education in the curriculum, 80% indicated that it "should" be included.

Influences on the Public Schools

Table 7 presents the greatest influences in deciding what is taught in the public schools and the greatest influences in selection of books.

TABLE 7

INFLUENCES ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Responses in Percentage

What is taught		Textbook Selection	
53%	Local school board	87%	Teachers
40%	Parents	26%	Principals and School Administraters
25%	State government		
17%	Teachers	13%	School board
3%	Federal government	12%	Parents
3%	No opinion	2%	No opinion

(Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.)

Table B presents teachers' impressions about different professions and occupations. The professions were rated according to the amount each contributes to the general good of society and also as to the amount of prestige and status accorded each profession by the community.

According to the respondents public school teachers are on a par with the clergy and physicians when it comes to contributing to the good of society. However, when it comes to the amount of prestige, public school teachers rank themselvers significantly lower than physicians, bankers, business executives, clergy, judges, local politicians, and others.

A zero to 10 scale is employed in the table. Zero indicates absolutely no contribution to the good of society while a 10 represents the greatest possible contribution. Similarly in the prestige table zero indicates the percentage of respondents who felt an occupation had no prestige or status in the community, while a 10 shows extremely high prestige and respect for the particular occupation.

TABLE 8

OCCUPATIONS: PRESTIGE AND GOOD OF SOCIETY

Amount of Prestige	(Percentage) 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Advertising Practioner	2	2	3	11	7	32	10	13	8	6	6
Bankers		1	1	1	2	3	3	7	25	30	27
Business Executives		1			2	5	5	12	22	30	23
Clergy		2	1	3	6	7	9	12	21	14	25
Funeral Directors	1	2	6	10	9	22	9	16	12	8	5
Judges		1	2		3	5	5	8	18	26	32
Local Political Offices		2	1	3	7	14	11	17	20	15	10
Physicians		1	1	1	1	2	2	4	12	24	52
Public School Principals		1	3	7	9	20	17	19	15	6	3
Public School Teachers		5	10	13	19	23	11	11	4	2	2
Realtor	1	3	4	6	10	25	15	17	14	4	1

Good of Society	(Percentage) 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Advertising Practioner	2	8	10	18	13	28	7	6	7		1
Bankers	1	2	2	6	8	20	15	17	16	8	5
Business Executives	2	1	3	6	7	19	16	20	15	8	3
Clergy		2	1		1	3	3	6	13	20	51
Funeral Directors	1	2	4	9	9	23	14	12	13	8	5
Judges			6	2	4	11	7	14	19	19	18
Local Political Offices	2	2	2	7	6	23	14	14	19	6	5
Physicians			2		1	2	3	8	19	24	41
Public School Principals		1	1	3	3	10	6	14	23	21	18
Public School Teachers		1		1	1	3	3	3	19	25	44
Realtor	2	4	7	10	12	30	12	11	9	1	2

Goals of Education

A series of goals of educaton were presented to the respondents. Each goal was rated on a scale of zero to 10. A 10 means a goal is the most important and a zero means a goal is not at all important and should not be a part of the public school program. Table 9 presents percentages of the zero through 10 scale for each of the 25 goals of education.

The educational goals the respondents perceived to be most important were to develop the ability to think - creatively, objectively, and analytically; and, to help develop good work habits, the ability to organize one's thoughts, the ability to concentrate. The least important goal of education as perceived by the respondents was to help students get good high paying jobs.

Conclusions

The tentative conclusion which can be drawn from this study appears to say that South Dakota teachers are satisfied with their schools as they are but not so satisfied with them that they don't want to move toward higher standards and a continual upgrading of the curriculum.

Some of the findings of the study indicate that teachers give South Dakota schools and their own schools a "B" grade; teachers gave teachers in their local schools a "B" grade; teacher education also received a "B" grade.

The respondents indicated no difficulty in hiring or retaining good teachers; low teacher salaries was the primary reason given for leaving the profession; merit pay was strongly

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TABLE 9

GOALS OF EDUCATION

		(Percentage)										
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
To help develop good work habits, the ability to organize one's thoughts, the ability to concentrate	1						1	1	4	16	23	55
To develop the ability to think - creatively, objectively, analytically	2							2	6	15	19	58
To develop the ability to speak and write correctly	3						1	2	5	18	21	53
To develop the ability to use mathematics for everyday problems	4						1	5	12	18	20	44
To encourage the desire to continue learning throughout one's life	5						1	5	10	21	19	44
To encourage respect for law and order, for obeying the rules of society	6							4	10	17	25	44
To develop the ability to live in a complex and changing world	7		.5		.5	1	5	3	10	22	22	36
To prepare those who plan to attend college for college	8						6	6	12	23	22	31
To develop skills needed to get jobs for those not planning to attend college	9					1	5	5	11	18	23	37
To develop standards of what is "right and wrong"	10	.5	.5		1	2	9	6	10	13	17	41
To develop the desire to excel	11	.5	.5	1	2	1	8	8	13	23	19	24
To develop an understanding of democracy and to promote participation in the political process	12	.5		.5		4	11	9	17	20	18	20
To develop the ability to get along with different kinds of people	13					2	5	6	13	19	19	36
To develop respect for and understandin of other races, religions, nations, and cultures	14					2	6	11	11	19	18	33
To develop the ability to deal with adult responsibilities and problems, i.e., sex, marriage, parenting, personal finances, alcohol and drug abuse	15				2	5	5	8	11	22	19	28
To help students make realistic plans for what they will do after high school graduation	16				1	1	5	8	12	21	22	30
To develop an understanding about different kinds of jobs and careers, including their requirements and rewards	17				2	2	9	8	16	23	16	24
To gain knowledge and understanding of science and scientific facts	18				1	1	11	12	21	24	15	15
To gain knowledge of the important facts of history, geography, etc.	19			1	1	2	10	12	21	25	14	14
To develop an appreciation for and participation in the arts, music, literature, theater, etc.	20			2	2	3	11	16	18	22	11	15
To help students overcome personal problems	21			1	1	2	13	14	18	19	14	18
To develop the ability to understand and use computers	22		1	2	3	2	17	17	16	23	10	9
To promote physical development through sports programs	23		2	4	4	5	22	14	15	14	11	9
To help students get good/high-paying jobs	24	3	2	4	4	7	22	16	15	13	7	7
To develop an appreciation of the "good" things in life	25	5	4	5	5	5	18	11	12	14	9	12

opposed by the respondents; and awarding higher salaries to math and science teachers was also strongly opposed by the respondents.

Some of the greatest problems perceived by teachers in the community were the parents' lack of interest and the lack of proper financial support. Three school problems that concerned the teachers the most were assignments not completed, talking back to the teachers and truancy.

Teachers believe that children should be promoted from grade to grade only if they can pass examinations; that all high school students in the United States should be required to pass a standard nationwide examination; and, a standard examination should be required for all prospective teachers prior to teacher certification.

South Dakota teachers see the traditional subjects such as English, mathematics, science, history, etc., essential for college-bound students. They also see these same subjects as nearly as essential for non-college-bound students.

The respondents do not want a longer school year or school day. They see sex education as a necessity for inclusion in the curriculum.

Local school boards and parents are perceived to have the greatest control over what is taught in the public schools. However, teachers have the greatest control over textbook selection.

Public school teachers consider themselves to be on par with clergy and physicians when it comes to contributing to the good

of society. However, when it comes to the amount of prestige, public school teachers ranked themselves significantly lower than physicians, bankers, business executives, clergy, judges, local politicians and others.

Teachers believe the ability to think-creatively, objectively, and analytically to be the most important goal in education.

South Dakota teacher attitudes appeared quite positive on most questions. The concern over a national education malaise does not seem to have affected South Dakota in any significant way.

References

Gallup, A. (1984, October). The Gallup Poll of teachers' attitudes toward the public schools. Phi Delta Kappan, pp. 97-107.